Belfast City Centre
Westside Regeneration Masterplan
Creating a new future for the Castle Street/Fountain Street Area

Department for Social Development
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1. Introduction
This Regeneration Masterplan for the Westside area of Belfast City Centre constitutes proposed supplementary guidance to the Department for Social Development’s (DSD) Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre (‘the RPS’), adopted by the Department in April 2004. It sets out further guidance on the proposed range, mix and location of uses for this area of Belfast City Centre, to maximise the physical, social and economic regeneration of the area. The masterplan provides guidance on how the Westside can be developed and incorporated into the wider regeneration of Belfast City Centre. It sets out the key development principles, a broad framework to which future developments in the area should ideally adhere to and a concept plan.

2. Westside Regeneration District
In taking forward the regeneration of this area, DSD proposes to promote the area as the Belfast City Centre ‘Westside Regeneration District’. DSD believes that this designation conveys our vision to promote regeneration of the area which will strengthen the key arterial route from West Belfast via Castle Street to the City Centre’s main shopping area and to develop new high quality pedestrian links which help to fully integrate the area with the wider City Centre.

The Westside area broadly follows the Prime Retail Core boundary set out in Draft BMAP, covering both sides of Castle Street and is bounded by Berry Street and Castle Street to the north, Donegall Place to the east, Donegall Square North and Wellington Place to the south and College Square East, College Avenue and King Street to the west. The Westside study area is identified below.

Significant progress with regeneration projects in Belfast City Centre has been made to date. Victoria Square opened for trade in March 2008 and masterplans for Part One of the North West and North East Quarters were adopted by DSD in 2005. Subsequently, a development proposal for the North East Quarter was selected by DSD in March 2006 and the Northside Urban Village Regeneration Framework was published in May 2009. In addition, the “Belfast Streets Ahead” public realm project has commenced, which will transform the streetscape of the City Centre’s main streets and public spaces. Work on the first phase of the project commenced in July 2007 and is due to complete in 2010.

The purpose of the masterplan is to identify how the full regeneration potential of the area can be realised within the quarter and the wider City Centre, and provide a basis on which DSD can use its regeneration powers (if necessary) to ensure delivery of this potential. DSD may use this masterplan as a basis to prepare Development Briefs for appropriate parts of the area, which will provide clear guidance to developers on the type of scheme that would be supported within the Westside.

The whole area to be covered by the masterplan is important in regeneration terms as it connects the City Centre to the communities of West Belfast. It provides the potential to consolidate the retail offer provided in the area. It also provides significant scope to retain the historic character of the area as the old street grid is largely intact. While there is a degree of dereliction in the area there are also a number of fine buildings and strong urban design attributes.

3. DSD’s Regeneration Remit, Statutory Authority and Policy Objectives
DSD’s policy objective for regeneration, in pursuance of the Department’s statutory authority, is to promote and implement a comprehensive approach to tackling social, economic and physical regeneration and redressing disadvantage in cities and towns across Northern Ireland.

DSD’s statutory regeneration authority derives from: Part VII of the Planning (NI) Order 1991 (as amended by the Planning (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, Article 31), which provides the legislative basis for comprehensive development schemes, land acquisition and disposal of land, and the extinguishment of public rights of way; and the Social Need (NI) Order 1986, which provides the statutory basis for granting financial assistance to projects...
in areas of special social need and undertaking environmental improvement schemes. The statutory powers referred to above are exercised in the public interest by DSD to assist in the assembly and vesting of lands for the purpose of comprehensive development. DSD's powers are exercised in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998. In exercising its powers, the Department also has a duty to promote equality of opportunity as required by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and to give regard to the Northern Ireland Executive’s New TSN objectives in relation to combating unemployment and increasing employability.

DSD therefore plays a central role in developing and co-ordinating the implementation of urban regeneration programmes throughout Northern Ireland including Belfast City Centre. The Department’s approach to the regeneration of Belfast City Centre will be in adherence with its statutory authority and having regard to the regeneration policy objectives, priorities and plans set out in the DSD Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Statement (RPS) published in April 2004. The objectives for Westside (referred to in the RPS as the South West Quarter) are set out in Chapter 3 of the RPS. The RPS also makes clear the other key Northern Ireland Executive policies that are relevant to the exercise of DSD’s statutory authority.

**Equality Statement**

DSD is fully committed to complying with Section 75 obligations of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which deal with the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) on the Regeneration Plan has been completed to Stage 6. The Stage 6 EQIA report is available from the Department or on-line at www.dsdni.gov.uk/publications. The Department has given due consideration to all representations made during the EQIA consultation process and has amended this final masterplan accordingly. In implementing the masterplan for the Westside, the Department will take account of the points expressed during the EQIA consultation in order to address potentially adverse differential impacts and to further promote equality of opportunity across the Section 75 Groups.

In particular, responses to the consultation suggested that development of the Westside will have a negative differential impact on persons with a disability/older people in terms of accessibility. Concerns were expressed about the amount of access by car and public transport, as the plan emphasises pedestrian access. In the implementation of any redevelopment, the Department will give careful consideration to access by all users, including those with a disability and older people.

**Regeneration Objectives for the Westside**

The context for this report has been provided by DSD’s Belfast City Centre Regeneration Policy Statement (RPS), adopted in April 2004. The RPS sets out the Department’s objectives and approach to achieving the regeneration of Belfast City Centre which includes the formulation of strategy and the production of masterplans. The RPS identifies Westside (referred to in the RPS as the South West Quarter) as a part of the City that remains vibrant, diverse and provides an important gateway from West Belfast.

DSD does not anticipate bringing forward any major comprehensive development scheme for this area at present. However, the area does have potential for regeneration, and DSD intends to identify smaller scale redevelopment opportunities to further enhance the attractiveness of this area.

In order to address issues of disrepair in the area, the RPS sets out DSD’s objective to prioritise investment in the public realm. DSD’s adopted Public Realm Strategy for Belfast City Centre (February 2005) identifies a range of improvements to the built environment within the area, a number of which are now being realised through the “Belfast: Streets Ahead” public realm programme.

**4. The Westside Regeneration District**

Whilst located adjacent to the retail core of Belfast City Centre, the Westside has its own distinctive character, appearance and form. At its eastern boundary, it offers a strongly defined and impressive frontage onto the key civic spine of the City Centre, Donegall Place, but this scale and grandeur is swiftly lost along the streets running towards the west, which are characterised by largely incoherent styles and forms of buildings.

The Westside is today characterised as both a retail area and a secondary office location for a number of professional service providers and government agencies. It also has a strategic geographical role as a gateway into the City Centre from the west. Although there are over 100 apartments under construction within the quarter, residential use is currently still in its infancy.

Café culture is beginning to emerge, with cafés on both Fountain Street and College Street now spilling out onto the pavements and helping to create a more vibrant atmosphere. However, there remains significant scope to further promote this type of positive activity throughout other parts of the Westside.

Fountain Street

New Residential Development - College Court
Despite its proximity to the prime retail street of Donegall Place and the well established CastleCourt Shopping Centre, the Westside is typified by smaller scale independent retailers catering to both niche and local markets.

Without any apparent over arching guidelines or aspirations as to how the Westside could develop, landowners have been, perhaps understandably, bringing forward schemes which deliver development on sites predominantly within their ownership. Consequently, the resultant scale and form of recent developments have not enhanced the Westside as a whole. This development uncertainty has further undermined the appearance of the area by leading to landbanking in parts which has resulted in there being a number of prominent derelict or cleared sites sitting vacant, despite their close proximity to the increasingly vibrant heart of the City Centre.

Failure to adopt strong development principles for the Westside which seek to take on board the wide range of aspirations held by local businesses and stakeholders, is likely to result in the continued fragmentation and character erosion of the Westside. This has the potential to undermine the recent improvement in the independent retail offer of the quarter, particularly evident along Wellington Place and Fountain Street. Properly nurtured and promoted, this growing independent retail core has the potential to develop the Westside as a distinctive and characterful foil to the more mainstream retail offer available elsewhere within the City Centre.

The Westside offers a diverse retail mix, from niche clothing stores, through to family run butchers and cafés. However, despite the mix of these retailers having the potential to create an eclectic and interesting shopping experience, at present the Westside’s lack of a coherent feel and poorly defined urban environment is acting as a barrier to enticing both casual visitors and Belfast residents to fully explore the quarter.

The Westside is currently not subject to a clearly defined development brief and despite most of the quarter falling within the Belfast City Centre Conservation Area, much of the character of the area has been eroded by piecemeal developments of varying quality and style.

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Failure to adopt strong development principles for the Westside which seek to take on board the wide range of aspirations held by local businesses and stakeholders, is likely to result in the continued fragmentation and character erosion of the Westside. This has the potential to undermine the recent improvement in the independent retail offer of the quarter, particularly evident along Wellington Place and Fountain Street. Properly nurtured and promoted, this growing independent retail core has the potential to develop the Westside as a distinctive and characterful foil to the more mainstream retail offer available elsewhere within the City Centre.

Guiding Development Principles

- **Character Preservation** – reinforcing distinctiveness and identity.
- **Sense of Place** – establishing the Westside as a destination in its own right.
- **Scale** – promote development which responds to the traditional heights and rhythm of the quarter’s historic built environment.
- **Mixed-use Development** – encouraging residential development to both increase passive security and increase round the clock vitality.
- **Promoting Independent Retailers** – both through an enhanced urban environment and also through schemes such as Retail Therapy and the ‘reStore Programme’.
- **Traffic Calming** – creating pedestrian priority areas and shared use streets.
- **Improved Links** – both to other quarters of the City Centre and also to West Belfast.
- **Accessibility** – ensuring that the Westside is accessible to all, on an equal basis, including disabled people, older people and all of the Section 75 Groups and aligned with the principles of the Department for Regional Development’s (DRD) Accessible Transport Strategy 2009-2012.
- **Quality Public Spaces** – promoting the Westside as a place to dwell in rather than just pass through.

The masterplan vision is to establish the Westside as a vibrant mixed-use quarter, with an emphasis on the encouragement of new restaurants, cafés, bars and living accommodation and strengthening its role as a location for independent and specialist niche retailers. Reintegrating the Westside with the wider retail core is a key aim of the masterplan and is seen as crucial to ensuring that the area is not left marginalised from the significant regeneration the rest of the City Centre is currently enjoying. A rejuvenated Westside would not only add to the diversity and richness of the City Centre experience for residents and visitors alike, but would also help to act as a key gateway and link both to and from the communities of West Belfast.

Development of new living accommodation (combined with other uses such as retail) is required to attract private sector investment into the area and create a destination that will be vibrant and attractive to both occupiers and visitors. Any new development within the quarter should be mixed use and residentially led, and may include retail, office, hotel and leisure/tourism (where possible). The masterplan seeks to build on the area’s individual and unique character by strengthening its attraction as a place to socialise in bars, cafés and restaurants, live and shop.

Given the varying land ownership patterns across the quarter, and the need for any new development to complement rather than compete with CastleCourt, Victoria Square and other planned and prioritised developments within the North East Quarter, the North West Quarter Part 1 and the Northside Urban Village, we would envisage that development will be brought forward as smaller, individual opportunities which adhere to the masterplan’s development principles. Where possible, any new schemes should seek to retain important historic and/or listed buildings and consider bringing back into beneficial use parts of the quarter which have remained derelict or unused for many years.

Context and Physical Fabric of Existing Buildings

The built character of the Westside is most apparent along the Donegall Place elevation. However, many of the streets elsewhere within the Westside include gaps, where the finer grain historical character has been replaced with insensitive architectural treatments. Despite this, there are pockets of quality buildings which remain including the warehouse style buildings on Queen Street, St Mary’s Church, Linen Hall library and Queen’s Arcade.

Within the Westside there are a number of derelict and under-utilised sites and buildings, primarily along Queen Street, Marquis Street, the upper end of King Street and College Avenue which have the potential to be more efficiently used and enhance the continuity of streetscape.

The surface car park and adjoining multi-storey car park to the east of Queen Street significantly detracts from the area. Elsewhere within the Westside, some of the quality historic buildings have fallen into disrepair, and are vacant especially on the upper floors, such as the listed former Police Station on Queen Street. Linen Hall Library and 11-18 Donegall Square North would both benefit from restoration to their ground floor frontages. It is important that such key historic buildings are retained and enhanced as part of the masterplan process.
**Existing Mix of Uses**

The majority of the Westside’s prime retail offer is situated on Donegall Place. In general, moving west, the quality and amount of retail floorspace deteriorates and the dominant use becomes secondary office use, with some more recent residential developments focussed around the junction of College Street and Castle Street. In recent years there has been some improvement in the café and coffee shop offer within the Westside, particularly along Fountain Street and the eastern end of College Street. In addition, the Mourne Seafood Restaurant fronting onto Bank Square has proven to be highly popular, suggesting the potential for the Westside to further develop a more expansive catering offer.

There is a need to increase the mix and quality of uses in the Westside. Residential use is currently limited to the new developments in the Northwest corner of the quarter, but there is considerable potential to develop a City Centre residential community bringing into use under-utilised upper floors. This would increase vibrancy and security within the Westside and help lead to the development of a truly mixed-use quarter. It will also be important to further inject other uses such as more cafés, restaurants, bars, and possibly arts and cultural facilities, to enhance the day long life of the area.

**Urban Qualities**

When comparing the urban grain of the Westside in 1860 with that of today much of the early street layout and block sizes remain intact. However, it is apparent that there are large open spaces where the urban grain loses its containment and enclosure, creating poorly defined routes.

Proposals within the Westside should respond to repairing these gaps with new development that is sensitive to the existing grain and massing. The established vertical massing of the area and façade detailing creates a sense of place and urban quality and should be maintained. Features such as corner turrets and domes offer a repeating theme which acts as both principal and secondary focal points. These features act as subtle devices to create vistas and turn corners, thereby aiding legibility of the area.

**Existing Built Form, Enclosure and Scale**

The historic gaps in the streetscape of the Westside have prevented a true sense of enclosure. The east side of Queen Street and College Avenue contain large gaps in the enclosure of the streetscape forming a poorly defined built form. Along the west side of Queen Street there is a significant variation in scale and form, this significantly impacts on the street’s level of activity and subsequent footfall generation. The scale of existing buildings within the area range from one to five or more storeys, leaving several gaps within the quarter that are prime for redevelopment and an improvement in the level of enclosure.

Existing focal points and landmarks within the Westside include:

- Donegall Place/Royal Avenue/Castle Street junction
- 1-15 Donegall Place/12-16 Castle Street
- 41 Queen Street/College Street corner
- 13-21 Chapel Lane
- Views down Donegall Place to Donegall Square
- Primark 1-27 Castle Street
- Bank Square
Access and Movement within the Westside

The Westside road layout, characterised by a grid and block structure with one-way links, was designed to facilitate the passage of movement for road traffic and serves to discourage walking and cycling as a means of travel. High traffic flows along Wellington Place mean this road acts as a barrier to movement for pedestrians to and from the Westside from Donegall Square where a large number of bus services operate, and also the independent retailers on streets around the Spires Shopping Centre. Likewise, the large number of traffic movements at the Castle Street junction with College Avenue and along College Avenue serve as a barrier to pedestrian movement to and from the west.

Whilst the on-street parking along Queens Street and Castle Street located outside retail units provides good penetration into the quarter for the private car, this does give rise to significant shortcomings in terms of the safety and attractiveness of the public realm. Pedestrian and vehicle movement conflicts are common, often with pedestrians stepping into the road between parked cars. Illegal parking occurs in bus cages and in the pedestrianised area of Fountain Street.

The seven key objectives of the Accessible Transport Strategy are to:

1) Manage effectively the transition to a fully accessible transport network in partnership with key stakeholders to maximise the benefits for older people and people with disabilities.

2) Ensure that the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requirements are met and affordable adjustments are made so that accessibility for people with disabilities is a condition of public money being spent on all new PT (public transport) investment.

3) To develop, in partnership with key stakeholders, an integrated fully accessible PT system which will enable older people and people with disabilities to travel in safety and in comfort and move easily between these modes.

4) To enable older people and people with disabilities to travel safely using cars and other means of private transport.

5) To address attitudinal and psychological barriers that prevent or discourage older people or people with disabilities from using transport services and facilities that are available to them.

6) To ensure information is available in formats available for all PT services.

7) To provide help with travel costs to enable older people and people with disabilities to use transport services available to them.

Servicing Access

Servicing access is currently handled in an ad-hoc way i.e. via back of house and some on-street servicing. Currently there is a large area embedded in the block between Queen Street and Fountain Street and is accessed off Queen Street. The properties backing onto Marquis Street and College Court use these streets and alleys for servicing, making this an unfriendly pedestrian area. Bank Square is, in effect, a service zone, acting as a service access for the retail on Royal Avenue and Castle Street. This presents challenges to the public realm and aspirations for its future use as a public square. King Street to Berry Street forms another service access which also cuts off ease of movement to the north and west from the Westside.

Car Parking

There are currently four car parks within the Westside. In addition there are two multi-storey car parks located at the periphery of the quarter at CastleCourt and on King Street, which are well positioned in terms of access, but not well connected to the quarter from a pedestrian’s perspective. Much could be done to improve this pedestrian connectivity eastward to the centre.
The temporary surface car parks on Queen Street and College Avenue/College Street, whilst both well used on week days, represent inefficient use of prime City Centre land and are considered key development sites. At present, these two surface car parks break the urban grain and create visual intrusions. These sites need to be developed, in order to contribute to the area’s character rather than detracting from it.

Connectivity
King Street to Castle Street and College Avenue south of Castle Street have become a barrier to West Belfast. Movement to and from West Belfast could be improved through enhancements to pedestrian and cycle crossings at the Castle Street/Millfield/King Street junction and again at the junctions of College Avenue with Wellington Place and Howard Street. Additionally, crossings from Queen Street to Wellington Place and from Queen Street to Fountain Street (connecting to Donegall Square West) could be made pedestrian friendly with raised hard standing surfaces to greatly improve connectivity to the high end retail developing in this area.

Key Opportunities and Connections
The Chapel Lane connection into the CastleCourt Shopping Centre is an essential link from and into the Westside. This link could be greatly enhanced by the proposed improvements to Bank Square as well as the establishment of additional frontages to the flanking properties along Chapel Lane. The longer opening hours of the CastleCourt Shopping Centre will also assist with maintaining footfall along this link into the early evening.

The New Route

Contributing towards a City Centre wide network of high quality streets and squares is central to the preferred concept masterplan. The new street through the heart of the quarter seeks to draw in some of the considerable footfall

Without a reconfiguration of the service yard to CastleCourt, it is unlikely that the link between Berry Street and Royal Avenue can be improved in the short term. This will be addressed through the implementation of the North West Quarter Part 1 (NWQ1) Masterplan, which seeks to open up Berry Street and improve connectivity across the area, repairing the blocking effect of CastleCourt.

In general, the connections along the eastern boundary of the Westside are better developed. There is however scope for further activation of frontage along Fountain Lane which could improve connectivity to Castle Lane, Arthur Square and Victoria Square beyond, with the new street proposed in the masterplan. For eastward pedestrian movements, Castle Street and Wellington Place appear to currently work well, with only minor improvements (such as wayfinding signage and streetscape furniture) needed to improve connectivity.
from Donegall Place and the CastleCourt Shopping Centre and contribute to the creation of a wider retail circuit around the City Centre. At one end of this proposed pedestrian only route, a new Fountain Square would act as a visible draw from Arthur Square along Castle Lane and offer a strong visual reference point to the opportunities that lay beyond within a revitalised Westside. At the other end of the new street, a sensitively remodelled and reconfigured Bank Square would offer a peaceful retreat to relax and provide a much improved setting for St Mary’s Church.

Commercial Issues
The Westside is one of the City’s core retail quarters and is situated adjacent to two well established retail destinations – CastleCourt Shopping Centre and Donegall Place – the latter is the City’s traditional prime retail pitch.

Belfast’s retail and leisure offer has been significantly enhanced by the Victoria Square scheme, which opened in March 2008 and provides 74,300 sq m (800,000 sq ft) of new retail and leisure accommodation, including a new House of Fraser department store.

Further pipeline development will strengthen the City’s retail offer. The Royal Exchange development within the North East Quarter will provide approximately 32,500 sq m (350,000 sq ft) of additional retail accommodation, including a new department store. It is intended that Royal Exchange will predominantly provide retailers to complement the middle to upper middle retail offer of Victoria Square and the existing prime retail pitch at Donegall Place.

Beyond the core retail area, the quality of the shopping environment deteriorates significantly. Whilst the Westside is one of the City’s shopping quarters, it is an area in gradual decline. The eastward shift in retail offer brought about by the opening of Victoria Square and the Royal Exchange proposals are likely to further exacerbate this deterioration.

The eastern boundary of the Westside has frontage onto the prime retail section of Donegall Place, moving west, the strength, tone and quality of the retail offer varies significantly. Although the majority of retail provision is secondary and/or has a bias towards independent or service industry occupiers, better quality independent and some multiple retailing is visible in certain parts of the quarter. For example, Fountain Street and the streets to the south of Wellington Place are becoming increasingly popular with quality occupiers. Recent openings include Molton Brown, Fat Face and DC Clothing who have joined a number of upper market independent fashion retailers in the area.

However, other streets within the Westside fare less well, with Castle Street and King Street in particular being proliferated by discount comparison and convenience retailers. Despite the proximity of these streets to CastleCourt and Donegall Place, they are not fully integrated into the mainstream retail circuit and consequently do not benefit from the considerable footfall which passes through the area.

The masterplan takes account of the analysis of retail capacity included within the Draft BMAP technical supplements. Any new development with a retail element within the Westside would be supported by these. Managing the timing of any development within the Westside and other areas of the City is very important to ensure a) the success of future schemes, prioritised and supported by DSD and b) that development happens within the City in a phased and commercially acceptable manner.

Certain key commercial issues have been highlighted during the preparation of this masterplan. In particular:

• Whilst any new scheme would need to be of a much smaller scale than those proposed elsewhere within the City Centre, developments would need to be of a sufficient size to be appealing to both developers and investors, whilst providing a mix of uses that will be attractive to potential tenants and occupiers.

• The introduction of sufficient residential accommodation is important as this will encourage City Centre living and provide a basis for the development of an evening economy – this will increase the area’s attractiveness to café and restaurant occupiers and in turn, encourage a longer dwell time.

• New apartments provided should be designed and targeted towards the owner occupier market rather than solely investors, to help create a residential environment which is sustainable over the longer term.

• Any new retail accommodation needs to complement rather than compete with CastleCourt, Victoria Square and the planned and prioritised developments within the North East and North West quarters of the city.

• New developments need to be accompanied by significant enhancements to the public realm combined with a longer term commitment to maintaining the quality of the urban environment.

• There is a perception that more visible policing to control anti-social behaviour would help to reduce negative perceptions of elements of the Westside and improve commercial confidence in the area.

• Existing planning and conservation regulations need to be enforced more robustly and consistently to avoid inappropriate new developments diluting the wider aspirations of the masterplan.

The type of uses that could help achieve this vision are:

• Residential
• Retail
• Restaurants, cafés and bars
• Hotel
• Offices

Other potential uses could be:

• Tourism and leisure
• Arts and cultural uses
Preferred Concept Masterplan

- Improved setting for St Mary’s Church
- Private parking courtyard with landscaping
- Potential to re-align King Street
- Encourage use of upper floors for residential
- Improved pedestrian junction
- Improved pedestrian crossing to West Belfast
- Private parking courtyard with landscaping
- Fountain Centre retained: First floor refurbished to promote cafè culture
- Character buildings refurbished

- Enclosed Bank Square: Potential for market activity/cafè culture etc
- Proposed building to add commercial activity to square
- Improved pedestrian junction: Potential for raised surface
- Refurbish existing buildings
- 1st Floor Courtyard Garden for residential above ground floor parking
- Promote outward facing frontages onto Fountain St, Fountain Lane, and Castle St
- Promote cafè culture with water feature or art work

Legend:
- CORE REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY
- KEY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
- KEY REFURBISHMENT OPPORTUNITIES
7. Preferred Concept Masterplan

Following the appraisal and analysis of the options, a preferred masterplan option (on pages 20-21) emerged, which illustrates how regeneration could be achieved by delivering a commercially viable new core to the Westside, an enhanced urban realm and improved links to neighbouring areas. In addition, several strategic development opportunity sites are identified which could be brought forward in separate phases. These sites have the potential to be developed as mixed-use schemes.

It must be emphasised that this plan is intended to act as a framework or guide. It illustrates principles for interpretation by the designers on subsequent schemes.

Preferred Concept Masterplan Key Features:

• Improved Pedestrian Realm – the masterplan seeks to build upon the ongoing “Belfast Streets Ahead Project” and set a framework for high quality public spaces linked by a robust and attractive pedestrian friendly streetscape.

• Improved Links – the masterplan recommends enhanced pedestrian crossing points to the residential and educational uses to the west of College Avenue and the City Centre.

• Streets and Squares – the masterplan envisages the longer term development of a legible pedestrian circuit around the City Centre which would include a number of high quality pause points including Bank Square, a new Fountain Street Square, Arthur Square and then moving north up into Writers’ Square.

• Residential Use – the masterplan seeks to promote mixed-use development and in particular introduce residential space above ground and first floor retail and leisure uses.

• New Street – central to the core redevelopment opportunity is the creation of a new pedestrian only route linking Chapel Lane and Fountain Lane which has the potential to support retail, café and restaurant activity.

• Promotion of Independent Retail – the size and layout of the retail units envisaged for the core redevelopment area are targeted at local, independent and niche retailers.

• Repair of the Urban Fabric – the masterplan identifies derelict and vacant sites along College Avenue, King Street and Castle Street which should be priorities for development to repair the gaps to the urban fabric.

• Better Transport Management – in conjunction with the highways options currently being developed by DRD Roads Service, the masterplan seeks to restrict private car access into the Westside and in particular, better manage car parking within the quarter.

• Creation of a More Secure Environment – the masterplan seeks to define public and private spaces and enhance security where appropriate for residential amenity and parking areas. It also sets out a framework to reinforce primary routes by removing seldom used cut throughs and putting pedestrians on routes with active edges and passive surveillance.

Core Redevelopment Opportunity

The core redevelopment opportunity illustrated on the masterplan for the site bounded by Fountain Street, Queen Street and Castle Street presents potential development partners with a specific development scheme to create:

• Approximately 7,400 sq m of new retail and restaurant/café space

• Approximately 200 new residential apartments

• Approximately 55 surface car parking spaces

• A new street to link the prime retail of Donegall Place with CastleCourt

Further Key Development Opportunity Sites

The masterplan identifies further key sites which could be brought forward for redevelopment and sets out guidance on preferred uses:

• College Avenue Surface Car Park

This site is currently subject to a planning application for a new hotel and office development. Such uses are considered complementary to the wider masterplan objectives subject to repurposing of satisfactory levels of parking on site.

• Marquis Street/King Street/Castle Street

This block currently demonstrates significant levels of dereliction and presents a poor gateway to the Westside from the west. The prominence of the site would make it suitable for some form of “gateway” development with preferred uses including hotel, office and residential, above street level retail and café/restaurant uses. The site is appropriate for a dense mixed use building which provides active edges onto the street scene and passive surveillance from above. The building mass should be relative to the scale of the established neighbouring built forms which already form part of the gateway into the City core and Castle Street. The resulting building should also respect the character and scale of Castle street itself.

• Bank Square

The masterplan proposes creating a sense of enclosure to the square by introducing a small two storey café/restaurant building to frame the north eastern end of the square and screen the existing inactive service yard frontages. At this stage it is not envisaged that Berry Street would be reopened due to the lack of an alternative site for the CastleCourt service yard, as this would require the redevelopment of CastleCourt as set
out in the NWQ Part I Masterplan. In any event, there is concern that reopening this route ahead of the redevelopment of CastleCourt would likely result in pedestrian leakage away from the new primary route envisaged through the core of the Westside. The Department will shortly be initiating a new design commission for this element of the masterplan, which will look at the options for regenerating Bank Square.

In summary, the preferred masterplan option (including the core redevelopment opportunity) offers the longer term potential to provide accommodation for approximately:

- 322 residential units (including 20% as affordable provision)
- 22,928 sq m retail/café/restaurant use
- 23,803 sq m office/business use
- 280 additional hotel rooms
- An estimated 2,416 jobs

It is not envisaged that all of this development would be provided simultaneously and DSD will seek to work with development partners to ensure appropriate phasing of new schemes.

**Key Benefits**

The key benefits of the preferred concept masterplan are set out below.

**Better Integration of the Westside**

Despite the Westside’s proximity to the heart of Belfast City Centre, it is not as well integrated into the rest of the City Centre as it could be. In particular, it is an area which is at present often being overlooked by both tourists and shoppers and is failing to fully capitalise on the significant footfall generated along Donegall Place and Wellington Place. The creation of a new pedestrian street linking Chapel Lane and Fountain Lane provides a new natural route for pedestrians to pass from the CastleCourt Shopping Centre down towards Donegall Place, Arthur Square and Victoria Square beyond.

In addition, a new art or water feature is envisaged at the western end of Fountain Lane so as to act as a visual draw to encourage pedestrians into the Westside from Donegall Place, in accordance with the “Belfast Streets Ahead Project” which seeks to promote public art and public realm improvements in Belfast City Centre.

Improved pedestrian links through Bank Square to Royal Avenue, across Wellington Place to the Spires Shopping Centre, and across College Avenue to Divis Street, and the Belfast Metropolitan College are also recommended.

**Strengthened Independent Retail Sector**

The independent retail scene in Belfast is strong and continues to grow. Initiatives being promoted by the City Council, Belfast City Management and retailers themselves are helping to raise the profile of independent shops. The masterplan strongly supports these programmes and promotes the creation of additional units targeted specifically at cafés, restaurants, and independent and niche retailers, to help develop the Westside as a distinctive area to shop in.

In conjunction with a reconfigured streetscape, the masterplan also envisages better branding of the Westside through a coherent approach to street furniture and signage; the further development of the city wide “Retail Therapy Programme”; the encouragement of additional street activity such as outdoor café areas and craft markets and DSD’s ongoing “reStore Castle Street” pilot, which has provided a range of initiatives to help improve trading in the area.

**Enhanced Vitality**

The introduction of residential use into the heart of the Westside is intended to help stimulate activity outside business hours. At present, much of the land in the centre of the quarter is occupied by surface car parking and secondary office and storage use on upper floors. This has resulted in the creation of inactive frontages, particularly in the evenings and at weekends. Injecting residential use into the heart of the quarter and relocating less active uses such as offices and parking to the periphery helps to create passive security and promotes round-the-clock activity.

The masterplan also makes provision for enhanced areas for café and restaurant activity. In particular, the redevelopment of Bank Square and the development of a small square at the intersection of Fountain Street, Fountain Lane and the proposed new street helps create an environment where shoppers, office workers, students and tourists can pause and take a break. In line with the City Council’s “More Time Campaign”, it would be expected that both restaurants and shops within the Westside, would be encouraged to remain open into the evening.

**Coherent Development**

Without seeking to be overly prescriptive, the masterplan seeks to provide clear guidelines to help steer development coming forward within the Westside. The recent revival in central Belfast has created an environment increasingly favourable to speculative development, signs of which continue to be seen within the Westside, despite the recent economic downturn. Channelled appropriately, the private development sector has the potential to contribute positively to the enhanced vitality of the quarter.

**Protection of Heritage**

The masterplan encourages the re-use of historic buildings and better promotion of the character buildings in the Westside. For example, an improved environment for Bank Square would enhance the setting of St Mary’s Church, the Mourne Seafood Restaurant and Kelly’s Cellars, all of which contribute positively to the character of the quarter and at present are undermined by their surroundings.

In addition the traditional warehouses on Queen Street are identified as having potential for loft style apartments and studio space which would help contribute to the creation of a distinctive and potentially slightly bohemian quarter. Despite being a more recent building, the
Fountain Centre is considered to play an important role in the Westside’s heritage and its enhancement and refurbishment would be encouraged so as to further develop as a hub for independent retailers at ground level with cafés opening onto the terrace above.

**Highways Benefits**

The masterplan option seeks to complement the wider highways initiatives being proposed by a number of Government Agencies such as DRD Roads Service, DRD Regional Planning and Transportation Division (RPTD) and DSD “Belfast Streets Ahead Project” in consultation with Belfast City Council. There are currently a number of options being considered which have arisen from the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 which will be subject to a separate consultation programme by DRD Roads Service.

In summary, the various agencies envisage the following key aspirations:

- Completing and enhancing the City Centre Ring Road which would act as an orbital urban boulevard to remove a number of strategic trips from the City core.
- Improving pedestrian and public transport priority on the “Belfast Cross” comprising High Street, Castle Place and Castle Street, and creating pedestrian routes along Donegall Place and Donegall Square North.
- Reduce the levels of long stay commuter car parking within Belfast City Centre.
- Reduction of transport movements along Wellington Place and the introduction of two-way bus movements along Castle Street with new bus stops introduced towards the northern end of Queen Street.
- Creating quality walking routes, which would include the complete pedestrianisation of Fountain Street, Fountain Lane and College Street to the east of Queen Street within the Westside.
- Seeking to create a Rapid Transit system for Belfast City Centre by 2015.

The preferred concept masterplan has sought to respond to these aspirations and, in particular, offer the following benefits:

- **High Quality Pedestrian Realm** – the proposed new street would be fully pedestrianised and landscaped to the same high quality as those streets currently subject to the “Belfast Streets Ahead Project” which would help create an attractive and legible route through the City Centre. This is in line with the Department’s commitment to provide a high quality urban environment that is accessible to all, including people who have reduced mobility.

- **Improved Public Transport Connectivity** – the western end of the new street would align with the potential new bus stops at the northern end of Queen Street, which provide effective public transport penetration into the Westside.

- **Improved Castle Street Environment** – it is not considered that full pedestrianisation of Castle Street would necessarily be desirable as it would significantly impede the ability to penetrate the Westside by public transport and likely reduce the levels of footfall. Instead, the preferred masterplan option envisages an enhanced bus and pedestrian priority environment for Castle Street provided for by the creation of a high quality shared surface street treatment and the removal of on street car parking.

- **Improved Links** – the preferred concept masterplan seeks to take advantage of the potentially significant transport movement reductions along Wellington Place and Donegall Place and promote enhanced pedestrian links across these streets to provide better connectivity with other quarters within the City Centre.

- **Controlled Car Parking** – the preferred concept masterplan seeks to provide reduced levels of car parking for the new residential units in the core of the Westside with residents parking provided at a ratio of approximately 0.25 spaces per unit. This level would be justified by the accessibility of the Westside to the primary places of work, shopping and leisure within the City Centre and the expectation that any new development would be required to be accompanied by a site-wide travel plan which promotes car sharing, public transport use and improvements to walking and cycling conditions. The Department also recognises that future regeneration of the Westside will have to take account of the specific access/parking requirements of people who have reduced mobility, in accordance with the “Belfast Streets Ahead Project” and DRD’s Accessible Transport Strategy.

**Links with other Regeneration Masterplanning in North and West Belfast**

DSD will take forward the implementation of this Regeneration Masterplan having regard to: the proposals set out in the Belfast City Centre North West Quarter Part One (Redevelopment of CastleCourt) Masterplan; The Belfast City Centre Northside Urban Village Regeneration Framework; the Royal Exchange Regeneration Project; the Draft Masterplan for the former Crumlin Road Gaol/Girdwood Military Barracks; and, the emerging proposals for regeneration of neighbourhoods adjacent to the City Centre.

8 Adoption of the Regeneration Masterplan and Implementation

This Regeneration Masterplan is adopted as supplementary guidance to DSD’s Regeneration Policy Statement for Belfast City Centre. Implementation of the adopted Masterplan is subject to market response, available funding, economic appraisal, and satisfying all statutory requirements.